The Decorator

Volume XLII No. 1 Asbury Park, NJ Fall 1987

Journal of the
HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF
EARLY AMERICAN DECORATION, INC.

HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF EARLY AMERICAN DECORATION, INC.

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Journal of the
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Volume XLII No. 1 **Asbury Park, NJ** **Fall 1987**

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Man of New Bedford by William Matthew Prior, 1844, Courtesy Fruitlands Museum, Harvard, MA. NOTE: Could this portrait represent Prior's "Flat picture without shade or shadow"?

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EDITORIAL

The author of the article, "PORTRAIT PAINTING IN EARLY AMERICA," needs no introduction. Doris Carroll has impressed us with her in-depth study of primitive portraiture and her exceptional craftsmanship.

Last year, while Doris was teaching a class in primitive portraiture, one of her students mentioned that she owned an original portrait that might be of interest to the class. The painting had come into her possession through the estate of her mother-in-law who had purchased it at auction many years ago. When Mary Robinson brought the portrait to class, Doris was reminded immediately of other strikingly similar portraits which had been attributed to John Blunt.

At the following class, Doris Carroll brought in research material substantiating her theory that Mary was in possession of an original John Blunt portrait. Subsequently, the painting was taken to the Boston Museum of Fine Arts where the attribution was confirmed. Mary has since taken the painting to an appraiser and has been told that she truly owns a valuable original.

For many years, Mary has hung the painting on a wall in her home, appreciating the intrinsic aesthetic value that this portrait has had for her. Now it has been established that her possession also has real value in the world of American Folk Art! Below is the portrait of Martha Nelson attributed to John Blunt c. 1833. The other photo is from the back of the portrait's frame. Both pictures are courtesy of Mary Robinson.

Jane Bolster

PORTRAIT PAINTING IN EARLY AMERICA: THE ARTIST, THE ARTISAN, THE AMATEUR

Doris Carroll

Although portrait painting in the New England Colonies began in the 1600's (30–40 years after the first settlements were established here), a portrait-purchasing class did not emerge until around 1725. It was not long thereafter that artists began crossing the ocean to take advantage of this new market for their work. It is probable that many of these artists were relatively obscure at home where the competition was keen. They realized the importance they would assume in the American Colonies—where artists were few—and where there was very little art with which to compare their work.

These foreign-born artists brought with them a style of portraiture then popular in Britain and on the continent—a style learned in the art academies of Europe. Their subjects were portrayed in elaborate settings, with stylish costumes and aristocratic demeanor, emulating European fashions.

Although there were as many farmers as merchants in America in the early 1700's, it was the members of the upper levels of colonial society who commissioned portraits—the merchants, ministers and civil officials—and they wished to be portrayed in a manner that would symbolize their affluence and high position. The foreign-born artist was perfectly willing to comply with his patron's wishes and painted his subjects after the manner of English nobility. This style of painted portrait was satisfactory to both artist and subject until around 1740.

The middle of the 18th century was a time of transition in the colonies. The merchant class in New England had reached a point where it was they, rather than the clergy, who wielded the most influence and who would, subsequently, mould the character of American life. Theocratic protestantism was giving way to a more worldly commercial society. Accomplishment was becoming a measure of status, rather than inherited wealth and privilege, and Americans began to realize that they were very different from their English forebears; therefore, they began demanding a different type of portrait. They still wanted included in these portraits symbols of their accomplishments, both material and social, but they wished to be portrayed more as the men and women they really were—rather than an imitation of English nobility.

THE ARTIST

JOHN SMIBERT (1688–1751) arrived in the Colonies in 1729. He would be the foreign-born artist to exert the most influence on the American-born artists to follow. Commencing as a house painter in his native Scotland, Smibert moved to London where he decorated coaches and copied old masters for the dealers. He brought all of his professional equipment with him to the Colonies—his copies of old masters and prints. This was the only exposure many early Americans had to fine art.

Not long after his arrival here, Smibert responded to the cultural changes and modified his London style to meet the tastes of his middle-class clientele by eliminating some of the formality of his European-style portrait.

The Reverend James McSparren by John Smibert c. 1735
Courtesy of the Bowdoin Museum of Fine Arts, Brunswick, Maine

Portraiture in early America was centered predominately in New England. However, Dutch Patroon* portraiture flourished in the Hudson Valley around 1700–1750. John Smibert was the first of the foreign-born artists to make a living at taking likenesses in New England and even he had to supplement his income by activities outside of painting. He designed Fanueil Hall in Boston in 1742, and from his shop in Boston he sold painting supplies for commercial work as well as portraiture. His shop also served as a gallery of sorts where other artists came to view his work and his collection of prints.

Although Smibert was the major influence on American-born portrait artists to follow, the mezzotint, too, played an important role in defining art for the colonists. Many mezzotint portraits of English aristocracy were imported into the Colonies beginning early in the 18th century. Since there were no art schools here at the time, the mezzotint served as a school for both patron and artist. Compositions for many an early American portrait can be traced to the mezzotint.

Eventually, John Smibert's eyesight failed and he executed no commissions for several years before his death in 1751.

*Patroon—A member of the Dutch West India Co. who, on condition of planting 50 settlers within the New Netherland, was granted proprietory and manorial rights to 16 miles of frontage on the Hudson River, with all the land behind.

* * * * *

ROBERT FEKE (1705–1750) is established as the first native-born American to have achieved greatness in art. Feke was born around 1707 in Oyster Bay, Long Island. Little is known of his early life but it is doubted that he had any artistic training. The dates and places of his portraits make it possible that he had some contact with John Smibert.

Robert Feke's activity was centered mainly around Newport, R.I. until the retirement of Smibert (around 1745) when Feke moved to Boston. He also journeyed to Philadelphia to take likenesses of the mercantile aristocracy there. His portaiture further defined the emerging colonial portrait style—with greater emphasis on personal features and directly observed reality. His sensitivity to the real social and cultural characteristics of early Americans and his rare natural talent resulted in a style of painting that was to be used by many other American artists to follow—a style that was uniquely American—a true expression of the early American personality.

Feke went to Bermuda because of ill health and died there at the age of 44.

James Bowdoin II by Robert Feke, 1748
Courtesy of the Bowdoin College Museum of Fine Arts, Brunswick, Maine

* * * * *

JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY (1738–1815). It has been said that where some early American artists manifested a painting talent, John Singleton Copley displayed an artistic genius. His work hangs in almost every major art museum in the world and he is considered to be the foremost native-born American artist of his time. His work has achieved the permanence of great art.

There is no record of Copley's having had any formal art training during his painting years in America, although it is thought that he had access to the original paintings and copies brought here by John Smibert. Born in Boston in 1738, Copley had never been far away from Boston and yet, by the age of twenty, he had become a master in the art of portrait painting. He painted his subjects with an exceptional degree of accuracy,

Mrs. James Bowdoin II (Elizabeth Erving) by Robert Feke, 1748
Courtesy of the Bowdoin College Museum of Fine Arts, Brunswick, Maine

with emphasis on the character of the face. John Adams, in writing about Copley two years after the artist's death said, "You can scarcely help discoursing with them—asking questions and receiving answers."

Although he became very wealthy painting the mercantile aristocracy of Boston, Copley felt that his talent was not fully challenged there and he longed to go abroad to study and to work. Unsure of the reception his work would receive, he "tested the waters" by sending a portrait to London to be critiqued by the community of artists there. This portait, "Boy with a Squirrel" c. 1765, was considered by Copley to be his best effort and he anxiously awaited its reception in London art circles. The good reviews were forthcoming, but it was not until nine years after this event that Copley left Boston to go to Italy to study and to paint. From Italy he went to England in 1775 where he settled permanently.

After a time, Copley's work in London reflected a departure from

Henry Pelham (Boy with a Squirrel) by John Singleton Copley, 1765
Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts

his more provincial American style to that of the painting manner of the London school. John Singleton Copley was painting to the tastes of his clientele. Where in Boston his style had conformed to the tastes of the mercantile aristocracy there, he now painted to the tastes of England's true aristocracy.

John Singleton Copley was elected to the Royal Academy of Art in 1779. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston has a large collection of his work.

* * * * *

CHARLES WILSON PEALE (1741–1827) was one of the three founders of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, the oldest museum in America. A great painter, he was also a great patriot, naturalist, inventor and amateur dentist! He outlived three wives, fathered seventeen children and named them all after famous artists. He is perhaps best known for his portraits of major figures of the American Revolution, including George Washington.

Paul Revere by John Singleton Copley, 1768–70
Courtesy of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts

Patriotism, in the years after the Revolution, was at an all-time high and heroes such as Washington and Jackson enjoyed great popularity. Charles Wilson Peale had served with Washington in the Continental Army and, therefore, it is felt that the artist's portraits of Washington were less idealized than those painted by Peale's contemporaries, representing him in what was probably a more accurate portrayal of his features.

* * * * *

GILBERT STUART (1755–1828). Another portrait artist of the time famous for his portraits of George Washington, as well as many others, was Gilbert Stuart. Born in Newport, Rhode Island, he went to England around 1775 to study under Benjamin West.** On his return, he worked in Philadelphia, New York and Washington and finally settled in Boston

Thomas Jefferson by Gilbert Stuart, 1805-07
Courtesy of the Bowdoin College Museum of Fine Arts, Brunswick, Maine

in 1805. Stuart achieved greatness by narrowing his work to a particular kind of portraiture. He was one of the greatest of face painters. He had a highly personalized style and when asked why he did not make a habit of signing his portraits, he replied, "I mark them all over". Young painters came to Boston seeking advice from Stuart and it is said that he never turned anyone away from his studio. There was much sorrow in the country when he died in 1828.

With American-born artists such as Feke, Copley, Peale and Stuart to take their likenesses, early Americans were no longer dependent upon the foreign-born for this purpose. Although influence from abroad did continue to some degree, it was the portraits of these four artists that would exert a profound influence on most American portrait painters for the next century.

°°*Benjamin West* (1738–1820), born in America, went to Rome at the age of 22, then to England where he became historical painter to King George III. West was president of the Royal Academy from 1792–1815.

THE ARTISAN

At the same time that American-born artists such as Copley, Peale and Stuart were dominating the portrait painting scene, working for commissions from the wealthy segment of American society, there was another painter at work in this country. The professional artisan was busy working at any painting job he could get. Private coaches were being used at this time and sometimes artisans would be hired to paint entire scenes on the doors. However, the most prevalent body of work for the early artisan was the painted signs. Every shop and tavern had a sign and, at times the signs, too, developed into full fledged pictures.

An itinerant in many instances, it was this artisan who acquainted the early Americans who lived away from the large settlements with the only concept they had of art. He painted their barns, their furniture, their tinware and their walls—and it was not long before he began painting their likenesses.

Although the artisan found his main support in utilitarian work, the demand for portraits sharply increased after the American Revolution. As the century progressed, the United States population had increased almost five times and eleven new states had been added to the Union's original thirteen. Mortality rates were extremely high and portraits satisfied the need for genealogical records. As they did with the wealthy merchants, portraits also served as an expression of status for the more provincial early American. They, too, liked to be portrayed with symbols of their status, i.e., a map for a sea captain, a bible for a clergyman or dolls and wooden pull-toys for children. When country folk had no money to commission a portrait, the itinerant artisan often painted solely for his bed and board and one satisfied customer usually led to another commission. Since he earned little or no money, the artisan often was without adequate painting supplies. He substituted with whatever was at hand—sometimes using bed ticking for canvas. He ground his own paints, stretched his own canvas and made his own frames. He finished his work with an expertise that has allowed many of these paintings to survive today, in excellent condition.

As was true with the early American portrait artist, the honesty of these professional artisans resulted in a uniquely American portrait style. They developed a strong, personal way of painting. These artisan-paintings tended toward flatness and there was a deficient understanding of light and shadow. Most artisans had difficulty with perspective and spatial relationships. Often an object was outlined and then the color filled in. However, since the background of the artisan was, more often than not, that of an ornamental painter, he made up for his problems with draftsmanship by his appealing use of decorative color and design.

Sometimes the artisan signed his works, more often he did not. Much work has been attributed to particular artisans through research which has revealed characteristics peculiar to that painter. In other words, most had a "style" which makes their work recognizable.

Many artisans were self-taught with little or no artistic training. There was a fair amount of influence on those portrait painters living near the larger settlements by American painters returning from academic studio training abroad. Again, prints played an important part. Some of these professional artisans developed their craftsmanship to the extent that their work reached the lower levels of fine art. Conversely, much of the artisan portraiture ranks with the upper levels of the amateur. Thus, it should be noted that the categories of artist, artisan and amateur often overlap—dependent upon the talent, training and perception of the portraitist. Whatever his talent or training, the artisan, with his portraits, made a valuable contribution to American history. His work serves as a social document reflecting the customs and appearance of our ancestors and the times in which they lived.

* * * * *

WILLIAM MATTHEW PRIOR (1806-1873) was one of the most interesting of the 19th century artisans—both as an individual and as a portrait painter. Born in Bath, Maine, he was the son of a sea captain. His first known portrait was executed when he was eighteen years old.

Although it is believed that Prior had little or no formal art training, some evidence suggests that he may have met Gilbert Stuart. It is known that Prior named his first son Gilbert Stuart Prior. William Matthew Prior worked as an itinerant in many regions of New England and painted portraits as far south as Baltimore. He settled in Portland, Maine for a time and then moved to Boston where he lived and worked for the rest of his life. (See cover photo).

An ad in the MAINE INQUIRER dated April 5, 1831 gives us an idea of the manner in which Prior priced his portraits: "Persons wishing for a flat picture can have a likeness without shade or shadow at one quarter price". Although he was an extremely capable portrait painter, Prior was willing to short-cut his methods in the interests of saving time and making money. His "finished" portraits were proportionately expensive and he was apparently comfortable in giving the client as much portrait as the client was willing to pay for. His advertising included one in which he promised to paint a portrait in one hour—he included the glass and the frame—and charged $2.92!

The advent of the daguerreotype in 1839 and, subsequently, the camera, put a damper on Prior's portrait painting career and he turned

Mr. Winslow Purinton. Attributed to William Matthew Prior, 1835
Courtesy of Fruitlands Museums, Harvard, Massachusetts

his hand to other types of painting. He did continue to paint likenesses in the technique of reverse painting on glass and his subjects included famous persons such as George and Martha Washington, Benjamin Franklin and Abraham Lincoln. He produced many of these reverse glass paintings until his death in 1873.

William Matthew Prior was one of the most versatile and influential artisan painters of his time.

* * * * *

AMMI PHILLIPS (1788–1865) is probably the most well-known and popular folk artist today. His work is valuable and sought after. One of his portraits "Girl in a Red Dress" recently set an auction record for folk art painting, bringing a price of $682,000!

Phillips, an itinerant painter, never traveled beyond the New York, Connecticut, Massachusetts region (known as the "Border Country" in the

Mrs. Winslow Purinton. Attributed to William Matthew Prior, 1835
Courtesy of Fruitlands Museums, Harvard, Massachusetts

early 19th century) in a career that spanned over 50 years. A loner, like most itinerant artisans, he shied away from the cities and worked the small towns and villages. Over 500 portraits have been attributed to him and there are expectations of finding many more.

As he became more experienced, Phillips' work became less detailed than the work of his earlier years. He began painting with more speed, with loaded, loose brush strokes. He developed a formula way of painting and a distinctly brittle style. It has been said that his work is almost oriental in feeling. Others have described his portraits as bordering on the abstract. Whatever the description used, Phillips developed a way of painting that was very different from that of his contemporaries and his later work, although unsigned, is easily identifiable.

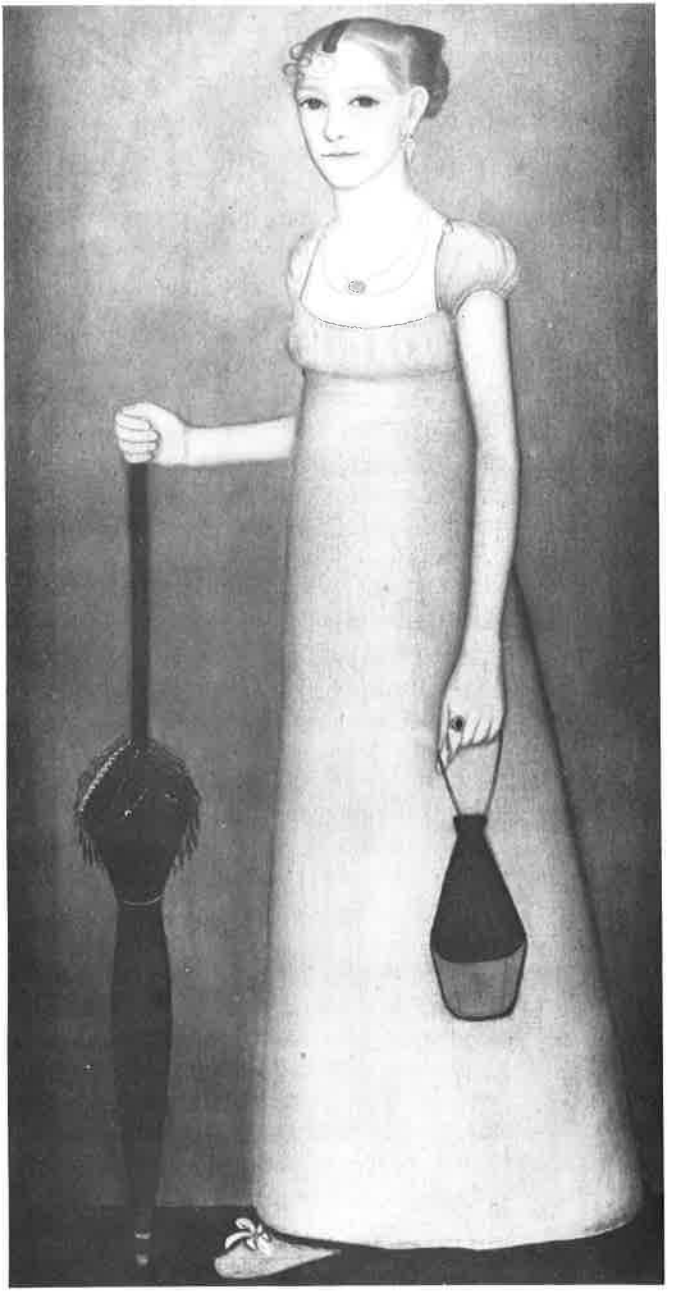
In many ways, Ammi Phillips' life is a classic study of the 19th century itinerant painter. His last dated paintings were done at age 74, three years before his death.

Mrs. Daniel Borden. Attributed to William Matthew Prior c. 1834
Courtesy of the Whaling Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts

ERASTUS SALISBURY FIELD (1805–1900) was born in Leverett, Massachusetts. Although he became an itinerant portrait painter in his teens, he never traveled more than a few hundred miles from Leverett. His work took him up and down the Connecticut valley—and it is probable that he frequently met up with Ammi Phillips who traveled the same territory.

Field's training, as far as is known, was limited to a few weeks in 1824 spent in the studio of the academic artist, Samuel F. B. Morse. Like William Matthew Prior, Field adapted and modified his technique according to the ability of his clients to pay. Records show that Field could complete a half-length portrait in a day—for which he charged $4.00. Apparently these pricing methods worked, since he was seldom without commissions. During his lifetime, it is estimated that he painted between 1,000 and 1,500 portraits of which about 500 still survive.

Field's work can be identified by the right frontal poses of his sitters, by pointed ears and pointillistic brushwork to define fleshtones. The faces of his subjects were often rough looking and his brush strokes readily apparent—having been painted quickly and boldly. Often, he painted a



Portrait of Harriet Leavena, c.1815 by Ammi Phillips, 1788-1865
Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Gift of Estate of Harriet Anna Niel

nimbus or cloudlike area in the background. Black dots and heavy impasto were employed to simulate lace. Field's style changed after the camera was introduced to this country. Where earlier he had painted from life, he now often used the photograph as a basis for his compositions. His work became increasingly photographic—lacking the vitality and strong, gay colors of his earlier work.

Erastus Salisbury Field was one of the most interesting and decorative of the 19th century itinerant painters and his work can be seen in every major folk art collection.

* * * * *

JOHN BLUNT (1798–1835) was born in Portsmouth, N.H., the son of a sea captain. He was the seventh generation of Blunts to live in New England. He was listed in the first PORTSMOUTH DIRECTORY published in 1821 as "ornamental and portrait painter". Although John Blunt did not sign his portraits, other items which were signed by him such as firebuckets and scenic paintings, together with his account book owned by collectors in Cooperstown, N.Y., have been instrumental in attributing to him around thirty portraits.

John Blunt's portrait painting style was singularly unique. His compositions often included a chairback or sofa seen over his subject's shoulder, with the left arm propped on the back and the right arm resting on an upholstered bolster. Like most artisan portrait painters of his time, Blunt had trouble with foreshortening. He was, however, an exceptional painter of faces. He used vibrant reds, yellows and greens when he painted the clothing of women and the jewelry and leg-of-mutton sleeves used in many of his portraits are stylistically related. Tortoise-shell combs were in favor for women during the 1830's, and these, together with the tight curls in hairdo's of the time are often seen in Blunt's portraits. (Please note: pictures on editorial page.)

Advertisements in the PORTSMOUTH and NEW HAMPSHIRE JOURNALS show that Blunt was willing to do a variety of painting tasks: profiles, profile miniatures, landscapes, ornamental painting, portraits, military standards, sign painting, marine painting, masonic painting, gilding ships' ornaments, bronzing, etc., etc. The account book mentioned earlier shows an entry where Blunt charged $1.00 for painting five dozen tin boxes for Joshua Hubbard, a dentist!

In 1831, John Blunt moved to Boston where he opened a studio. On September 12, 1835, the PORTSMOUTH JOURNAL published in the obituary column the following: "At sea, on board ship *Ohio* on his passage from New Orleans for Boston, Mr. John S. Blunt, aged 37, painter, of Boston, formerly of this town."

Sarah Church of Bristol, Rhode Island. Attributed to John S. Blunt c. 1835
Courtesy of Harvard University Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Gift of Mr. Frank R. Fraprie

* * * * *

No article on early American portrait painting would be complete without mention of the portraits of children. Since one-half of all children died in infancy, or before the age of five, parents were certainly justified in commissioning portraits of their children. If a portrait had not been painted before a child's death, often a painting would be commissioned after the child had died. Many haunting and ethereal portraits of children attest to this practice.

Coral necklaces appear in many 18th and 19th century children's portraits. This custom was brought to America by English colonists and was believed to ward off illness. Boys and girls of this period were dressed much the same until the age of eight. Where a girl's clothing changed little into adulthood, a boy would be allowed to wear breeches after the age of reason—which was thought to be eight years! Often, the sex of a child

The Robinson Children. Artist unknown c. 1835.
Courtesy of the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Gift of Burton and Jacqueline Cumming in honor of Professor Paul J. Sachs

under the age of eight can be determined only by the toys appearing in the composition. A boy might hold a wooden pull-toy or a whip, where a girl would hold a doll or a flower.

Children of this time were thought to be merely uncivilized adults—and many of these portraits reflect that thinking. Often a child will be portrayed with one shoe off and one shoe on—suggesting mischievousness in the child. A double portrait might show one child pulling the sash of another child's dress or "tweaking" the ear of a dog. These appealing paintings of children have left us with a legacy of beauty, charm and whimsey unequaled in any other time or place.

Girl with a Rose. Artist unknown, 19th century
Courtesy of Fruitlands Museums, Harvard, Massachusetts

THE AMATEUR

There were "Sunday Painters" in early America just as there are "Sunday Painters" today. After the American Revolution, early Americans began gradually to have more leisure time and, consequently, they started to fill that time with more creative endeavors. Previously, the men had been busy developing their manual skills and women filled their days with spinning, soap-making, sewing and a myriad of other household chores. The amateur painter in the 18th and 19th centuries sometimes painted for reasons other than pleasure, however. Often he wanted to memorialize a family member. As was true of the artisan, the amateur portraitist sometimes painted a likeness from a corpse in an attempt to create a visual record of a departed loved one.

Sarah Whitmarsh by Ruth W. and Samuel Shute c. 1833
Courtesy of the Currier Gallery of Art, Manchester, New Hampshire
Gift of James and Crosby Enright

Not unlike the professional artisan, the untrained amateur, too, had trouble with the technical problems of painting anatomy. These portraits, today, often appear humorous because of the problems the painter encountered with foreshortening and perspective. More often, the paintings reflect a charm and appeal that is difficult for the modern artist to duplicate. These primitive paintings, by the professional artisan and the amateur folk artist, now enjoy a tremendous popularity with art critics and collectors who value the portraits for their abstract representation and originality, rather than for their realism.

Much of the amateurs' work (and some of the work of the artisan) can be classified as bad painting. Jean Lipman, one of the foremost

authorities on American folk art has said, "The quality of the primitive painting does not vary with the degree of primitiveness but with the creative power of the artist. Without this creative energy, the picture is merely crude. There is much plain, bad painting among the so-called primitives and it is important to distinguish crudity from the rich, abstract design which characterizes the primitive masterpieces".

Jean Lipman also states, "It has been argued that American painters like West and Copley, who started out as unschooled amateurs but went off to Europe for study and eventually "graduated" to the rank of professional academic artist lost much of their originality and power along the way. What is certain is that their untutored, often anonymous contemporaries, who stayed close to home, painting the ordinary citizens of country towns and villages, created a body of work that is remarkable for its originality, vigor and variety".

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SOME RUSSION PAINTED DECORATION

Laura Orcutt

The first Russian tray to come to my attention and into my possession was in an antique shop where occasional treasures were to be found. What attracted my eye was the pattern of flowers decorating the tray—so similar, yet different, from what we then called "lace edge" painting. After some inquiries, I learned that the trays came from Russia.

Since then, I have seen many similar trays, decorated wooden-ware, and the exquisitely painted lacquer boxes typical of Russian hand-craft. In some ways their history parallels that of the decorated pieces with which we are familiar. Wooden-ware has been made in Russia for centuries. The gay flowers, berries, leaves and rhythmic brush strokes are surely akin to our country painting. I have also seen a few pieces that have been stencilled.

Decorated trays were a more recent development. The first Japanned trays were made in the Ural region in the early 18th century. Nizhni Fagil

Contemporary Russian tray with black background

Russian tray (red) showing the very distinctive shape of many Russian trays made before the 1917 Revolution

was one of many workshops which developed around the factories producing sheet iron. It flourished up to the middle of the 19th century. Elaborate pierced gallery trays were made and decorated there. Some trays were painted by professional artists and their pupils, often representing events in the life of the Czar, Peter the Great. Miniature gold leaf borders and fine striping were expertly executed. Trays were known to be the products of various workshops, but names of the craftsmen were unknown. Apprentices learned to paint with oils, silver and gold "metal dust" and to depict narrative scenes copied from pictures and engravings. On some floral trays the entire floor was filled with flowers. On others, small central bouquets were framed with garlands. Background colors were black, green, gold or red, and some trays had beautifully cut, fine stencilled borders. By the mid-19th century, the art of tray-making declined in Nizhni Fagil. It was far from markets, and pressure to increase output resulted in trays of inferior quality.

The city of St. Petersburg was founded in the 18th century by Peter the Great with the desire to bring European culture into Russia. By the

Wooden contemporary Russian tray with black background and red and gold decoration

middle of the 19th century that city was producing trays, bread and cake baskets and other objects similar to those made in Victorian England. Rococo designs, exquisitely painted flowers, birds, and scrolls decorated Gothic shaped trays. Mother of pearl was often used in their decoration.

In the 1830's and 40's, villages outside of Moscow began to produce oval and round trays of papier-mâché. Toward the end of the century, sheet iron became the favored material.

The village of Zhostovo became prominent and developed a style of its own. The most frequent decoration was a bouquet of three or four large flowers—roses, tulips, passion flowers and smaller ones such as pansies and morning glories. Petals were often accented with fine white lines. Trays were framed with intricate gold borders, some stencilled and some in gold leaf. Zhostovo was one of the few craft centers to survive into the early 20th century.

The life of a worker was hard. Workdays were long, fourteen to sometimes twenty hours, and use was made of child labor. A cooperative workshop was organized in 1912 to improve working conditions. It ceased to function in 1914, at the beginning of the First World War.

After the Revolution of 1917, work was resumed. In 1929 the Metal Tray Cooperative was formed. In 1960 it was renamed the Zhostovo Workshop of Decorative Painting. Unlike the past, the names of craftsmen

of this recent period are known. A great number of trays continue to be skillfully produced and painted, and many continue to be exported to the United States. Some trays manufactured before the Russian Revolution were stamped "Russia" or "Made in Russia". After that period the stamp has been "Made in the Soviet Union" or "Made in USSR", but often there is no identifying mark.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Russian Hand-Painted Trays, compiled by Irina Kropivina.
The Ornamented Tray, edited by Zilla Lea.
Illustrated Glossary of Decorated Antiques, by Mary Jane Clark.

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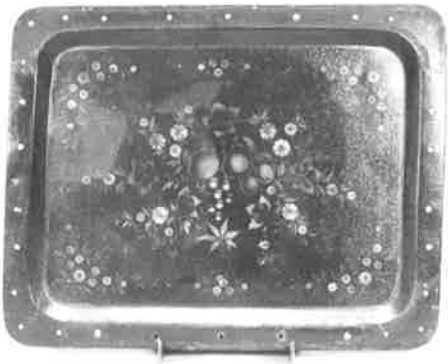
IN ERRATUM: Volume XLI, No. 2, THE DECORATOR, on pages 24 and 25, the name Janet Butler under the tray and the trunk should have read Janet Buckley.



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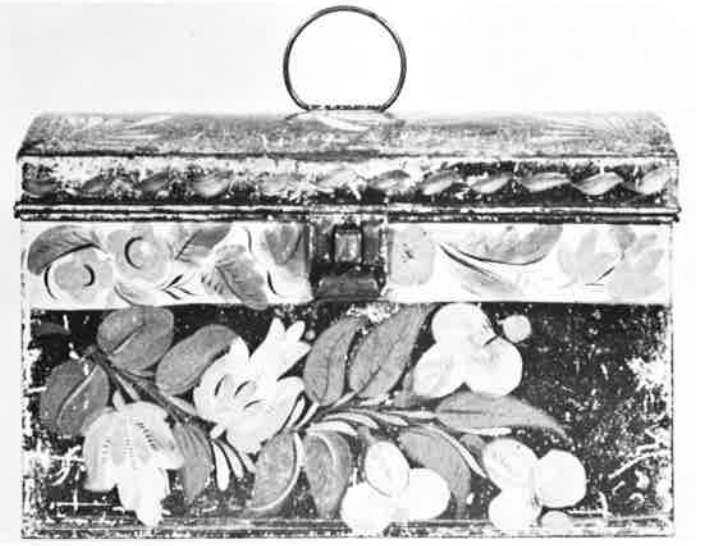

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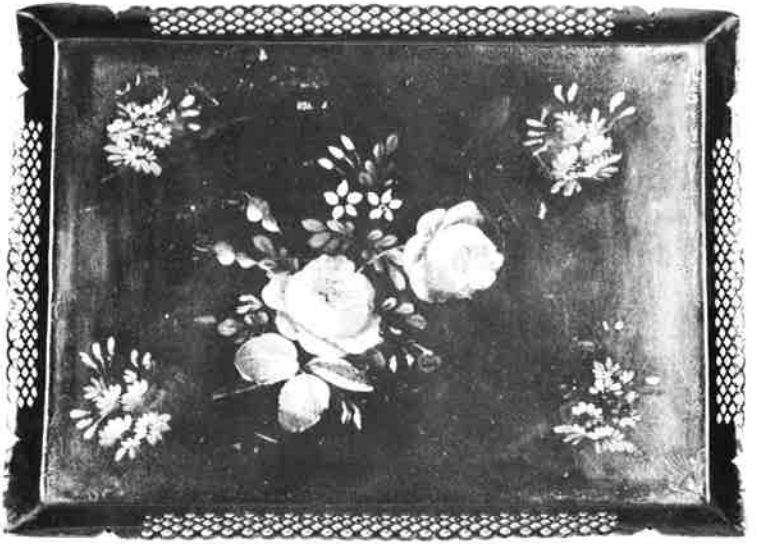

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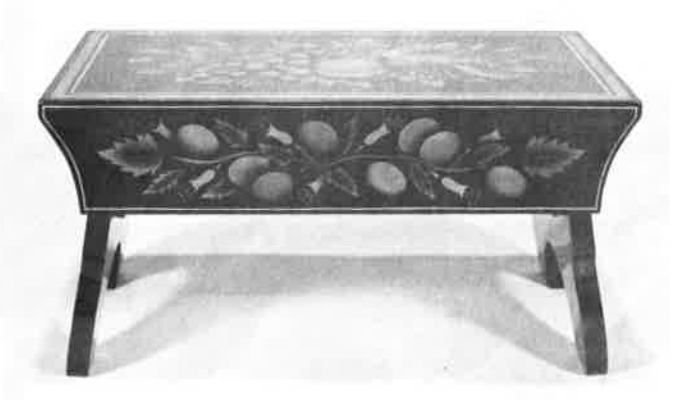
Lois Tucker

Stencilling on Wood



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Peggy Waldman

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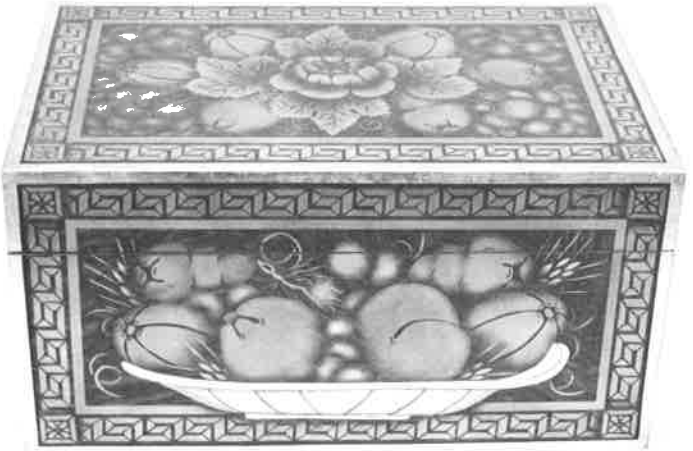

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THE BOOKSHELF

by Margaret K. Rodgers

American Folk Painters of Three Centuries, Jean Lipman and Tom Armstrong, editors. Hudson Hills Press, Inc., New York. In association with the Whitney Museum of American Art, 1980. 233 pp. Color plates and black and white photos. Index. Bibliography. $35.00.

American Folk Painters of Three Centuries is really the work of twenty-one authors who have all put extensive time into careful research concerning some thirty-five Folk Art painters covering 1687 through 1947. All the painters paint in the naive fashion. Some have familiar names, Ammi Phillips and Erastus Salisbury Fields to name a couple. Others such as Joseph Pickett have as few as four surviving paintings to earn them inclusion among the folk artists described. This book contains many interesting vignettes of some very remarkable artists as individuals. One was deaf, another was a twin. One was a woman, another was a black. Some were wealthy, others were impoverished. Some were able to make their money in their artistic pursuits, others were largely ignored in their lifetimes. Throughout the book it is very evident that the authors devoted themselves to extensive research into the lives of their particular subject. In many cases they can be credited with establishing some well deserved reputations by finding and identifying their works.

Included in the book is a chapter on Rufus Porter along with several color plates of his work. The chapter was authored by Jean Lipman and her usual careful historical accuracy is evident. The many and varied careers of this particular artist are examined with a discerning eye. The color plates provide the reader a good idea of the universality of the man—from painting sign boards to playing the fife, from inventions such as "flying ships" to portable boats. He even conceived of a car to move houses. The man was truly unique.

The book is divided into three sections dedicated to the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Therefore, it is very easy to put the artists into their proper historical period. One usually doesn't think of the 20th century as the province of a naive artist. However, excellent color plates and text provide appropriate recognition to several relatively recent workers in the medium who very definitely fall into the Folk Art category. Nor is all the

art taken from the Northeastern part of the United States. Included are Native American artists as well as one from Spanish New Mexico.

The reader is provided an excellent insight into a group of artists who painted with little or no training in America. The authors include some very familiar names, Mary Black, Nina Fletcher Little, Jean Lipman to name just three. The color plates are of excellent quality and the book is (or was) available in both hard and soft cover editions. For those members of the Society who desire more knowledge concerning our Folk Artists, this book would be an excellent one on your reference shelf.

Plain and Fancy—New England Painted Furniture, Heritage Plantation of Sandwich, Brian Cullity, curator, 1987. From an exhibit, May 10–October 25, 1987. Published by On-Cape Lithographers, Inc., Hyannis, Massachusetts. 88 pp. 64 black and white photos and 7 color plates. Bibliography.

Plain and Fancy—New England Painted Furniture, is a soft cover catalogue of an exhibit which took place at The Heritage Plantation in Sandwich, Massachusetts during the Fall of 1987. The booklet is reminiscent of a similar exhibit in Maine a few years ago. Some of the same items are on display as well as a wide range of other pieces of furniture created in various parts of New England. It would be worthwhile to examine some of these interesting items in person. This book is the next best alternative.

Perhaps the major reason to include this catalogue in your library is the fact that many of the pieces featured can be definitely attributed to individual decorators. Four are featured: Samuel Wing, the White family, William E. Wall, and the Cahoon family. A brief history of each of the decorators is included along with good photos of some of their stencils, the houses where they lived and worked, and some of the individuals concerned.

The exhibit included items from three centuries of New England painted furniture and each black and white photo is supported by an extensive description including the exact measurements, where the items came from, the approximate time frame, and other identifying information as available. The color plates are not accompanied by descriptions, but you can find the same items in the catalogue, sometimes photographed from a different angle in the sections with black and white photos.

The bibliography includes many familiar books and articles. Therefore, it can be assumed that a good deal of research went into making this an informative and instructive exhibit. This is also evident in the brief introduction to the exhibit. This includes a short but excellent review of the continuity within the various themes associated with painted furniture throughout the past three hundred years.

The Best of Painted Furniture, by Florence de Dampierre, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 597 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10017, 1987. 200 pp. All color photos, glossary, bibliography and foreword by Peter Krueger. $35.00.

It is difficult to think of the proper superlatives when describing *The Best of Painted Furniture*. Just to leaf through page after page of beautiful photos of exquisite furniture is a joy. Some of the photos feature the subject alone without any background to distract the eye. Other photos include walls, ceilings, and floors because they also are decorated and compliment the featured piece. The captions beside each photo are very helpful when in English but many French phrases may require a bit of research in the glossary depending on just how liberal was the art portion of the reader's education.

I found that I had to read the book in two ways. Initially I carefully examined all the photos, read the captions, and thoroughly enjoyed the visual feast lavishly illustrating this magnificent volume. Then I sat down and read the text, trying very hard to ignore the siren call of the photos so that I could absorb the full meaning of the detailed text. The chapters are arranged by country. It is no surprise to find France is covered in the first chapter as the author wrote the original book in French and this is a translation. The text is most informative from an historical viewpoint. De Dampierre takes the reader through various periods of furniture style linking the styles to events in each country historically and politically. After France she then proceeds to do the same for Italy, Spain and Portugal, England, the Scandinavian countries, and finally America. The American chapter might be a disappointment to some of the members of the Society as it is short and doesn't have the scope of the other chapters; but the fact that the author is French might explain her preference for things European. Two chapters follow devoted to the care of painted furniture, painted metal and papier-mâché.

It is clear from the book that the styles of painted furniture vary from country to country and period to period. The text explores the evolution of the many methods used to accomplish the splendid examples of the decorative arts illustrated and described. Individual masters of specific styles are highlighted such as the fine work of M. Martin in France during the reign of Louis XV. Others mentioned include Duncan Phyfe, Thomas Chippendale, and Sheraton to name a few that are instantly recognized by the reader.

When one reaches the final chapter devoted to America, you can easily see how the diverse peoples of the lands previously described brought over the styles of their native countries and then adapted their heritage to suit the new land. If one ever had the idea that furnishings,

wall, ceilings, and floors might have been dull and drab in the 17th, 18th or 19th centuries, this book will quickly dispell all those notions. The amount of intensive research that has gone into this volume is most impressive. The author displays exceptional knowledge about all aspects of painted furniture, American and its European antecedents, and she has put together an interesting text which compliments the outstanding photography. This book is a real treasure and I urge the membership to include it in their professional libraries. You will enjoy it and refer to it again and again.

Young America — A Folk Art History by Jean Lipman, Elizabeth V. Warren, and Robert Bishop.
Hudson Hills Press in association with the Museum of American Folk Art. New York 1986. Soft bound. Bib., Index, Photo credits. Color and Black and White Photos. 199 pp. $28.00.

Young America — A Folk Art History is the catalogue for a traveling show of American folk art, which can be seen in various parts of the country this year. The catalogue is well organized and put together, not by the usual chronological sequence of chapters, but by subjects. Folk art about farms, the cities, the sea, the household, war, the work place, and play are all dealt with clearly in chapter sequence. As one might expect when noticing the names of the three authors, the text is well thought out. Each of these well known folk art authorities contributes much expertise in compiling the items used in this show. Of particular interest to me was the fact that this catalogue encompasses the time frame from early Colonial days through World War I which is an extension of some fifty years over the usual definition of the American folk art period. To see early cars and airplanes pictured requires a reorientation in traditional thinking and, I believe, an agreeable one. After all, we remain a young country today, currently returning to our folk art heritage in societies such as HSEAD.

One can pick up this book and read a chapter or two, study the illustrations and photos, then put the book down. A bit later you can pick it up again and read another chapter and find it just as interesting and informative as the one read earlier. This enchanting volume is an ever-fresh look at the various activities of our forefathers.

The catalogue would make a fine addition to your library, not only for reference, but also for enjoyable reading. The book is a happy one.

The exhibit is scheduled to be seen at the Folk Art Museum in New York, The Tucson Museum of Art in Arizona, The Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan, the Mint Museum of Art in Charlotte, North Carolina, and the Terra Museum of American Art in Chicago, Illinois.

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Article IV
Section 2.

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Members should not use the name of the Society when writing personal opinions or criticisms to newspapers and magazines. Any matter requiring action by the Society should be referred to the President of the Society.

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